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SUBJECT: JORDAN: JANUARY 19 MEDIA REACTION TO GAZA

¶1. SUMMARY: Ceasefire announcements along with rescue and recovery efforts led Jordanian media coverage of developments in and around Gaza over the long weekend. The U.S. - Israel MOU also received front-page attention. King Abdullah's participation at the Sharm El-Sheikh meeting headed local coverage. Public demonstrations saw calls for economic boycotts and criticism of Palestinian President Abbas and the EU. Op-ed commentators expressed deep skepticism that the ceasefires would hold. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Throughout the local weekend, Sunday and today, major newspapers, especially Al-Ghad, stuck to banner headlines and large color photos of each day's major developments of events in and around Gaza. Events in Gaza and outside Jordan were almost exclusively sourced to international wire services.

¶3. All broadsheets on Monday led with rescue and recovery efforts in Gaza, reporting how "dozens of bodies were pulled from the mountains of rubble left by Israel's three-week offensive." Al-Ghad newspaper went further, describing the scene in Gaza an outcome of Israel's "scorched earth" policy. Newspapers gave front-page attention to Israeli Prime Minister Olmert's statement that IDF units would be withdrawn "as quickly as possible." The one-week ceasefire announced by Hamas and other militants also received prominent coverage. In addition, dailies carried extensive coverage of the outcomes of the "international summit" at Sharm El-Sheikh, focusing on King Abdullah's warning that without a lasting solution according to the two-state formula, "world leaders will again find themselves forced to meet endlessly to tackle a new Israeli aggression on the Palestinian people."

¶3. Monday's Jordan Times published a front-page report quoting Interior Minister Fayez as saying that more than 600 demonstrations had been held in Jordan during Israel's three-week offensive. Fayez boasted that the demonstrations took place under the supervision of law enforcement authorities who performed "without shooting a bullet, despite some provocations." He reportedly made the remarks during a meeting at the Lower House of Parliament on Sunday.

¶4. Israel's declaration of a unilateral ceasefire led Sunday's newspapers along with an Agence France Presse (AFP) photo of a missile strike early Saturday on an UNRWA-sponsored school in Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza. Sub-headlines reported King Abdullah's decision to participate Sunday in an "international summit" called by Egyptian President Mubarak at Sharm el-Sheikh. Al-Ghad reported that a "high-level Jordanian official source" described the call by Arab League member states meeting in Doha to suspend the Arab Peace Initiative as "a risky measure that would rob Arab negotiators of all tools and would deprive them of key means of managing the struggle with Israel."

¶5. Saturday's newspapers gave prominent coverage to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by Secretary Rice and Israeli Foreign Minister Livni on Friday to stem the flow of weapons and explosives into Gaza. Al-Arab Al-Yawm published a front-page photo of the signing beside a larger photo of an Israeli tank firing a shell. Both photos were credited to AFP. Reports on Friday's public demonstrations in Jordan also received front-page attention. "Thousands" of students, labor unionists, Islamists and opposition party members staged protests around the kingdom. Protestors burned

Israeli and American consumer products in front of the Professional Associations complex. At a civil society conference organized by Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood, participants condemned Palestinian President Abbas for not attending the Doha summit. Journalists at the conference reported that MB leader Hammam Said called for annulling the Wadi Araba treaty and cutting all ties with Israel. Elsewhere on Friday, activists delivered a petition to the EU mission in Amman opposing the EU's position on the conflict. Riot police reportedly dispersed a crowd of approximately 200 young men who tried to approach the Israeli embassy in Amman's Rafieh neighborhood. Three persons received minor injuries, according to a PSD spokesman.

16. Editorial Commentary

-- "The Same Conclusion!"

Columnist Jamil Nimri in the January 19 edition of the independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad comments, "As we expected and feared, the formula for stopping the war did not come as part of a comprehensive package that includes withdrawal and ending the siege, but rather connected with only one thing, which is arrangements to prevent arms smuggling and supply.... Indeed, the main conclusion from this fascist and bloody campaign, which should be focused on and repeated day and night, is that without resolving the Palestinian issue and ending the occupation, there will always be disruptions and wars in the region."

-- "What Ceasefire After the Blood Hysteria?!"

Columnist Barhoum Jaraisi in the January 19 edition of Al-Ghad fulminates, "The experience of Israeli criminality does not at all

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encourage expectations that the ceasefire, which Israel announced, will last. This is because Israel has maintained the trigger which it could use as pretext for another strike, while it has been reassured by the 'understanding' of world decision-making countries, especially the United States. Most likely, the Israeli decision is wily and maneuvering decision to justify the next massacre.... Israel sits at the bottom of a pit never known to humanity. Israel did not commit a 'holocaust' and there is no need to summon descriptions or names of racist and terrorist regimes from past history by which to describe Israel. Israel is a model all on its own. There is no need to draw comparisons or similarities. In fact, if those old regimes were here today, they would have a lot to learn from Israel."

-- "Arab Weakness"

Columnist Amr Hamzawy also in the January 19 edition of Al-Ghad inveighs, "The fact is that Israel launched its war on Gaza and arrogantly continued it, using excessive military force and committing war crimes against civilians, and then finished it unilaterally with very limited losses, and all the while not paying any attention to the angry world public opinion or to the concerns of the Arab countries, the moderate and the opposition. We, in the Arab world, have the responsibility ... of rationalizing this very miserable fact, without those ideological exaggerations or enthused speeches that ignore the Palestinian and Arab helplessness to prevent Israel from achieving its objectives from the war on Gaza.... I have no doubt that there are three factors for our helplessness, which have become very clear in the past few weeks. They are: the absence of the strategic compass for the Palestinian action, the hegemony of Arab conflicts and differences, and the weakness of the Arab League. The outcome is the actual liquidation of the Palestinian cause... and the complete marginalization of the Arab countries that have become mere objects in the context of international and regional security arrangements beyond their power.

The United States, which rarely enters into foreign commitments of a strategic nature during a presidential transition period, finds no problem in pledging extensive support for Israel to prevent arms from going into Gaza, which even a mention of Washington's ally and Gaza's neighbor, Egypt. It is as if Cairo's position, regardless of its nature, is of no consequence for the Americans and Israelis. The new arrangements are going to be put in place, like it or

not.... Meanwhile, the Palestinians celebrate their differences and entrench them through the exchange of obnoxious remarks between Ramallah and Gaza, as if Israel's brutality and the blood of civilians in Gaza are not enough for one moment of truth for national unity. As for the Arabs, they have a store-load of verbal confrontations... and calls for consultative summit meetings that turn into productions for bad and empty political rhetoric or conferences for passing the will of Israel and the west."

-- "For Gaza To Be Better"

Columnist and Al-Jazeera Amman bureau chief Yaser Abu Hilala in the January 19 edition of Al-Ghad : "With Israel's declaration of a unilateral ceasefire, the same scene of the June war [Lebanon 2006] repeats itself. The resistance came out with its head held high and its banner un-surrendered.... The Arabs convening in Kuwait must exercise pressure towards a national reconciliation government, because this will unify the Arabs who are divided on the basis of the Palestinian division and because it is the only point of entry for rebuilding Gaza."

-- "Salah Al-Bashir's Defense of the Peace Initiative and Jumping Past the Israeli Crime"

Managing editor Fahed Khitan in the January 19 edition of the independent, opposition Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm confesses, "Until recently, I had thought that the policy of open options with regard to relations with Israel was still valid, but remarks by 'a responsible Jordanian source' to the press on the sidelines of the Kuwait economic summit gives the impression that the government has folded that policy.... It was not at all appropriate to say those remarks. The minister should have waited until the current developments have been reviewed and until the Jordanian foreign policy has been redrawn in line with the national interest. Only then will be appropriate to defend or oppose the peace initiative. Commitment to peace as a strategic option does not mean continuing the negotiations, the handshakes, and the secret and public meetings as we have seen in the past few years. This path has not brought peace and has degraded us and became a cover for unforgivable crimes and a way to confiscate the Palestinian people's right to resistance."

BEECROFT